

STUDIES

in the Spirituality of Jesuits



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Conversion as a Human Experience

by

Paul V. Robb, S.J.

Published by the American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality,
especially for American Jesuits working out their aggiornamento
in the spirit of Vatican Council II

THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

consists of a group of Jesuits from various provinces who are listed below. The members were appointed by the Fathers Provincial of the United States.

The Purpose of the Seminar is to study topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and to communicate the results to the members of the Assistancy. The hope is that this will lead to further discussion among all American Jesuits--in private, or in small groups, or in community meetings. All this is done in the spirit of Vatican Council II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original charismatic inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the changed circumstances of modern times. The members of the Seminar welcome reactions or comments in regard to the topics they publish.

To achieve these purposes, especially amid today's pluralistic cultures, the Seminar must focus its direct attention sharply, frankly, and specifically on the problems, interests, and opportunities of the Jesuits of the United States. However, many of these interests are common also to Jesuits of other regions, or to other priests, religious men or women, or lay men or women. Hence the studies of the Seminar, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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Author's Preface

These reflections on conversion have grown out of my experience and teaching over the past several years in the Institute for Spiritual Leadership in Chicago. The deep participation in this program of many people from all over the world has given scope and meaning to my understanding of conversion. It is this that I wished to share with the readers of these *Studies*.

The members of the Seminar challenged and encouraged me to relate my understanding of conversion more directly to Jesuits and to the Society of Jesus. In this effort I have come to a greater appreciation of the central place which conversion has in our understanding of ourselves and our mission today. I am happy to highlight this dimension, which could get overshadowed by the stress on mission in our apostolic community.

The kind of affective conversion which is discussed here seems to have been neglected by spiritual writers during long years leading up to our not so distant past. Why this happened is still unclear. John W. O'Malley's article about recent trends in the study of the Counter Reformation (in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* for January, 1982) sheds light on this question and opens the door for further research. He mentions (on pages 23-24) the antifamily bias in much of the spirituality in the earlier centuries of the Society and the centering of spirituality in formalized institutions. Such an attitude would be at great variance with St. John Chrysostom's belief that if we do not weep over our loved ones, we can hardly be expected to do so for our sins and our souls, an important part of the kind of conversion treated in this paper.

My method of treatment will be to look at conversion from different perspectives and through different prisms. This procedure is somewhat circular and may not appeal to those who prefer the common sequence of a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has, however, this advantage: It addresses itself to the heart, which continually returns to some experience and discovers new meanings and treasures hidden there.

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CONVERSION AS A HUMAN EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION: Conversion as a Central Element in Jesuits' New Self-Understanding

As all Jesuits prepare for the 33rd General Congregation which will continue to deepen and expand the movements of the previous two Congregations, it is helpful to reflect on one aspect of that development which relates intimately to our spiritual heritage but could be overlooked or taken for granted. This aspect is conversion or ongoing conversion. Such conversion relates to the desire of many Christians for a more personal, incarnate spirituality. This spirituality finds its roots in Scripture and addresses individuals' experience of becoming mature and responsible adult Christians.

The 31st General Congregation began humbly and honestly, writing:

Thus it [the Congregation] has determined that the entire government of the Society must be adapted to modern necessities and ways of living; that our whole training in spirituality and in studies must be changed; . . . and that the very spiritual heritage of our institute, containing both new and old elements, is to be purified and enriched anew according to the necessities of our times.¹

This determination was radical in the sense that it called Jesuits to return to their spiritual roots which could have become encrusted over the years. Besides some specific legislation which was obviously needed, a good part of this Congregation was given to "The Better Choice and Promotion of Ministries."² With this in mind many of the initial efforts at renewal involved the evaluation and consideration of apostolates. The stance was outward as individuals and communities were asked how to change our apostolates and apostolic effectiveness. Management consultants, management techniques began to abound. In some way it seemed the concern was not with Jesuits themselves, but with the apostolates.

Alongside this development, the Congregation had made some probing

observations about formation and spirituality. The spiritual life was not to be cut off from the affective, intellectual, or apostolic life. Spiritual pedagogy should produce men who are free and mature. Finally, the spiritual pedagogy was to be adapted to those it was meant to help.³ In addition, individually directed retreats and ongoing spiritual direction began to touch Jesuits in ways they had not been affected before. With this some of the emphasis shifted from the efficacy of apostolates to the personal spiritual renewal of Jesuits.

Through the intervening years until the 32nd General Congregation, the Society experienced a new self-understanding in terms of mission in the service of faith and justice. The recent series of articles in the *National Jesuit News* by Thomas P. Faase, S.J., develops these changes. While there are few explicit mentions of personal conversion in the 31st General Congregation, though there are many implicit ones, the kind of changes initiated in spiritual formation touched the deeper aspects of conversion to be explored in this paper. Through the efforts of Jesuits to meet the needs of adult Christians, to become agents of change in new apostolates, many began to experience the confusion and alternation of emotions that characterize ongoing personal conversion. These experiences contributed strongly to the Society's renewed self-understanding described in the documents of the 32nd General Congregation. An experiential sense of conversion is central to the self-understanding of the Society which offers its documents "as a stimulus for conversion of heart and apostolic renewal."⁴ Both elements are highlighted, and the central place of conversion linked to genuine apostolic renewal becomes even more clear:

As apostles we are bearers of the Christian message. And at the heart of the Christian message is God revealing Himself in Christ as the Father of us all whom through the Spirit He calls to conversion. In its integrity, then, conversion means accepting that we are at one and the same time children of the Father and brothers and sisters of each other. There is no genuine conversion to the love of God without conversion to the love of neighbor and, therefore, to the demands of justice.⁵

In this issue of *Studies* I will be considering this kind of personal ongoing conversion, often referred to in recent literature as the second journey.⁶ I will explore this affective transformation as it touches the interior self-awareness of the Jesuit and Christian of today in his or her necessary quest for mature self-knowledge, the prerequisite for free

apostolic mission and action. This second conversion is the cornerstone of apostolic mission and ministry after Pentecost. It is radically different from the "call" experiences of the apostles and from their experiments in ministry before the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

A. A Renewed Understanding of Conversion Is Essential

It is important at the outset to reflect on different meanings that conversion has had within the Church and in Scripture. Confusion about what conversion is can be a part of much misunderstanding and misinterpretation today. Conversion is not just entrance into the Church. Nor is conversion adequately understood as responding to the call of Christ in religious life followed by long years of perseverance. Such an understanding may be the cause of irritation which some people feel with the continual emphasis on ongoing conversion.

In a stimulating and informative article, Bernard Lonergan suggests conversion as the solid basis of new theological understanding and of mature Christian living and mission in faith and justice:

Fundamental to religious living is conversion. . . . When conversion is viewed as an ongoing process, at once personal, communal, and historical, it coincides with living religion. For religion is conversion in its preparation, in its occurrence, in its development, in its consequents, and also alas in its incompleteness, its failures, its breakdowns, its disintegration.

Now theology, and especially the empirical theology of today, is reflection on religion. It follows that theology will be reflection on conversion. . . . [This] can supply theology with its foundation, and indeed, with a foundation that is concrete, dynamic, personal, communal and historical.⁷

Such conversion is "not merely a change or even a development; rather, it is a radical transformation on which follows, on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments. . . . A changed relationship with God brings or follows changes that are personal, social, moral and intellectual."⁸ Conversion, then, is a radical change in the person and personality, a transformation. It is not the substitution of a new self-image, no matter how upright, for an old one. It reaches down into the roots of an individual's affections, images, dreams, and choices. It touches all the dimensions of the human person that St. Paul writes about: "May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness. May He preserve you whole and

entire--spirit, mind, and body--at the coming of Our Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Such conversion is found in experience: the experience of blindness changing to seeing, the experience of a heart of stone to be transformed into a heart of flesh, the experience of unfreedom gradually transformed into the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. Such conversion is personal and historical. It is interwoven in the fabric and rhythm of each person's life. Such conversion is often symbolized as a journey or arduous pilgrimage, witness St. Ignatius reflecting on his own conversion. Recently Thomas Merton has emphasized renewed understanding of conversion and its relationship to religious life and mission:

The Christian is . . . one who abandons an incomplete and imperfect concept of life for a life that is integral, unified, and structurally perfect. Yet his entrance into such a life is not the end of a journey, but only a beginning. A long journey must follow: an anguished and sometimes perilous exploration. Of all Christians the monk is, or at least should be, the most professional of such explorers.⁹

This understanding of conversion is quite different from that often found in a "dogmatic" theology. In presenting a background for his new understanding of conversion, Lonergan suggests that theology began to fall behind toward the end of the seventeenth century with the introduction of "dogmatic" theology. The result, Lonergan writes,

replaced the inquiry of the *quaestio* by the pedagogy of the thesis. It demoted the quest of faith for understanding to a desirable, but secondary, and indeed, optional goal. It gave basic and central significance to the certitudes of faith, their presuppositions, and their consequences. . . . The new dogmatic theology not only proved its theses, but also was supported by the teaching authority and the sanctions of the Church.¹⁰

Such theology becomes deductive, static, abstract, universal; it stresses cognitive approaches to faith and spiritual issues almost to the exclusion of personal and affective experience. The search is not so much for meaning and understanding but for certitude. Lonergan writes that conversion "is a topic little studied in traditional theology since there remains very little of it when one reaches the universal, the abstract, the static."¹¹ Thus, he proposes that a renewed theology needs to be empirical, dynamic, in process, concrete, historical, particular. It needs to stress experiential approaches in the search for meaning and understanding.

In a dogmatic approach conversion seemed reduced to a process of socialization, perhaps presuming an interior purification and change. The answers to questions were more important than an embryonic faith seeking for understanding in the experiences of life. Individuals who were converts learned the certitudes of faith through catechisms and were socialized into the language, customs, rubrics, and rituals of the group on a behavioral level. The exploration of interior spiritual experiences which may have led an individual to conversion seemed to play a secondary--even optional--role in this socialization process. The same dynamic seemed true for many entering religious life. Often this was a socialization process for attaining a group identity or ideal by learning to think like, to talk like, and to act like the other members of the group. "Ours" was a powerful means of inclusion and exclusion! Conversion within this framework was often reduced to the asceticism of meeting the expectations of the group rather than the kind of purification and change identified by Lonergan.

But, along with these influential and more theological notions, conversion has always been a reality to those seeking God in their lives and in their relationships with others in service. This returns us to a scriptural reflection on conversion. The many calls to conversion, from those addressed to Israel in the Old Testament to the very personal invitations of Jesus in the New Testament, point to the centrality of the experience.

There are, however, different levels of conversion indicated in the Old and the New Testaments. There are significant differences between the call experiences of Abraham and Moses and the covenant experiences of each of them at a later time. In both cases there is an initial conversion which is a prerequisite for and the beginning of a second conversion later sealed in covenant. We find the same call to a second, deeper, conversion in Elijah, Job, and Samuel among others. It is this second conversion experience addressed to all of Israel which is announced and becomes predominant in the preaching of the prophets. It is a call to a new covenant beyond the covenant made with Moses. It involves a new understanding of sin and forgiveness and law.

The initial conversion experience is a call to a radical turning toward a new way of living and being. It is an invitation to "come and see," an invitation to the deeper conversion Merton indicates. In the New Testament

the call of the apostles is really an invitation to set out on a new course, a pathway to a deeper and fuller conversion of heart. We could consider the call of Simon as the invitation to this deeper conversion, a conversion accomplished with and in the passion and death of Jesus and sealed in the covenant described in John 21: Peter's commission to feed lambs and sheep. This commission is a far cry from being "fishers of men." It is a second conversion and the cornerstone of Peter's mature faith, hope, and love, the source of his apostolic mission.

I address this paper to Jesuits and all other men and women who hear and are challenged by the spirit of the decrees of the 32nd General Congregation. This assembly articulated the hopes and desires of Christians and people of goodwill all over the world who seek greater freedom in faith and justice and fuller life of the spirit. I also write for those who, in seeking to meet the hopes and expectations of many, begin to find they are asked to enter an experience of interior light and darkness which are very unfamiliar. In response to people who ask for a more mature and incarnate spirituality, including faith and justice, many priests and ministers are looking to fill the deficiencies of their own priestly and ministerial formation.

Lastly, and most importantly, I write this paper for those who may be experiencing in themselves and their lives the confusions which are part of this second conversion. I write for those who are bewildered at their own and others' experiences. After many years of prayer and faithful service, why should strong doubts arise, intense passions flame, meaning and truths grow stale, questions abound, and new kinds of darkness and sterility touch them deeply? The love of God which once sustained and motivated now seems elusive and illusory. Even a stubborn, sincere, and willful "I believe" brings no solace or respite. In fact, it can echo back mockingly. Darkness replaces light and depression becomes a familiar, though unwelcome, companion. Life becomes a desert similar to that described by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead trees give no shelter, the cricket no relief.
And the dry stone no sound of water.¹²

Such experiences are being recognized more and more as marks of this

conversion. They can move us at a central core of our existence. They are threatening to most people, perhaps especially to priests and religious who have considered themselves and have been considered as "converted." We often do not see ourselves as needing conversion; that is for others and it is something we know about. First conversion was considered as complete and total; all it needed was further growth and development and faithful perseverance. Such experience can bring shame and confusion that are difficult to express. While it may not be too difficult to read about and to admit we are wounded healers, in these experiences we begin to sense how deep the wound is and we often rebel and resist. In their darkness and in the dark of night, some go--like Nicodemus, another religious specialist--to find out from Scripture what is happening. The response is still enigmatic:

I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit. . . . I tell you most solemnly we speak only about what we know and witness only to what we have seen and yet you people reject our evidence. If you do not believe me when I speak about things in this world, how are you going to believe me when I speak about heavenly things? (John 3: 3-12).

It is difficult to endure conversion because it seems to put into jeopardy our very lifestyle and ministry, but even more so because we sense that it touches the very roots of our life. It reaches deep into our being--our personality, our choices, our very self. It touches in places that are unknown, places where we are strangers. To begin a journey into an unfamiliar, haunting land is frightening, but not to know whether we will find life or death, blessing or curse, at the end can be terrifying. To enter the journey with all its uncertainties provides the possibility of finding life and life in abundance. Not to begin the journey, but to harden and steel oneself against it, is already death.

In this issue of *Studies* I will consider second conversion as primarily an affective conversion involving feelings, emotions, and a change of heart. After walking around this interior kingdom of affections, we find that a transformation of feelings makes possible a real transformation of self. Without such a transformation of feelings, a so-called transformation of self is just a behavioral change; it will not last. Transformation of self begins

with a confrontation of myself in sinfulness. As self-confrontation deepens I come to true self-knowledge, to compassion and community with others, to knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord. Such a deep experience of mercy and justification issues in the experience of mission and apostolic endeavor. These themes will be the central chapters in this study.

PART I. THE DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION OF HEART

It is helpful to see how the Gospels present this second conversion. There we find the men and women who have accepted the invitation of the call of Jesus continuing to ask him often and in a variety of ways, even up to the Last Supper, about the promised kingdom and fullness of life. For those who believed in him he filled out and completed the meaning of his initial call, "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15). His response, however, remained a mystery to them until they experienced their own passion, death, and resurrection in his. "I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: what is born of flesh is flesh; what is born of Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6). Here the author of John indicates a new kind of life necessary to enter the kingdom. But this new birth is directly related to a previous death: "I tell you most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life" (John 12:24-25).

These images telling of the personal transformation needed for entry into the kingdom and for mature Christian life articulate the experiences which led the author of John to discover his own identity and mission in Christ. The images are not just of change and development, but they reflect the two most traumatic events in human life: birth and death. The experience of conversion--of entering the kingdom and mature Christian life--is found in the realities of birth and death, essential to the fabric and rhythm of human life. This conversion experience involves radical changes in person and personality, changes from flesh to spirit, from immaturity to maturity, as St. Paul so frequently emphasizes. This is a many-faceted process which

must be endured over time. It is a process to be endured on many levels and in different parts of ourselves until death occurs and a new birth or resurrection is possible. Birth and death are unlike any other changes or developments in human life. Precisely these images, with all their meaningful implications, best articulate for the author of John what is necessary in order to come to spiritual maturity, to share in the new life of Jesus and his mission, and to enter the kingdom.

A. The Interior World of the Heart: a Place of Affection and Confusion

In preaching about the kingdom of God, Jesus spoke about an interior kingdom within people's hearts and spirits. He was the master of the movements, the freedoms and unfreedoms, of heart and spirit. He was fulfilling and bringing to a new level of awareness and reality the words of Deuteronomy so prominent in his personal tradition: "The Word is very near to you--it is in your mouth and in your heart" (Deut. 30:14). The kingdom of God is not only in the outer world, but primarily in the interior world. From this interior world it must spread out to the men and women in the outer. It is a kingdom of life and love which comes gradually. "Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart . . . until you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and soul, and so have life" (Deut. 30:6).

In his preaching Jesus was bringing to fulfillment the covenants repeatedly promised in different ways in the Old Testament: "I will give them a single heart and I will put a new spirit in them; I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh instead. . . . Then they shall be my people and I will be their God" (Ezech. 11:19-21). This promise is more spelled out in the covenant with Jeremiah: "Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. . . . They will all know me, the least no less than the greatest--it is Yahweh who speaks--since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind" (Jer. 31: 33-34).

We see from these passages that the arena of this deeper conversion is the human heart and all its affections with their opposites and contradictions, freedom and compulsiveness. The invitation to conversion stresses the importance of going within, paying attention to, and taking seriously what we discover in the inner world of our spirit. It places emphasis on our

feelings, emotions, memories, dreams, imaginations, and the movements and changes we find there. All of these aspects of our interior put us in touch with our own light and darkness, our freedom and unfreedom, the living and stagnant parts of ourselves, our beliefs and our prejudices, with the heart of stone in our bodies which needs to be transformed. Yet this interior kingdom with its contrasts and opposites is the place to discover ourselves and life, the place where I know that God is my God and I am his son or daughter. This knowledge points to an affective conversion, as indicated by William Johnston:

If we are faithful to Jesus of Nazareth and to the contemporary world, we must purify and update our religious practice in such a way that it will lead to an affective conversion--an affective conversion, thanks to which feeling will flower and flourish and assume its rightful place in the Christian life. Such a conversion is eminently possible. . . . Christian prayer leads to a wonderful refinement of human feeling, to the vivification of the interior senses, to a transformation and transfiguration of affectivity and sexuality. This is what I call affective conversion.¹³

Anyone who journeys to the interior world is confronted with fear and confusion, with the swirl of opposites, the flowing back and forth of warmth and coldness, of selfishness and love. And yet it is necessary not to be afraid to move into this shifting world with all its uncertainties, for this is where my life in the spirit is discovered. Henri Nouwen writes:

The inward man is faced with a new and often dramatic task: He must come to terms with the inner tremendum. . . . Just as the God outside could be experienced not only as a loving father but also as a horrible demon, the God within can be not only the source of a new creative life, but also the cause of a chaotic confusion.¹⁴

This same emphasis on interior experiences of affections, feelings, images, and desires was also a part of the spiritual pedagogy of Ignatius and Pierre Favre. The ambiguities and alternations of this interior world of the heart were evident to them. In April, 1543, while directing Peter Canisius in the full Spiritual Exercises, Favre wrote to Ignatius:

I see more clearly than ever certain evident signs for proceeding in the Exercises--how important it is for the discernment of spirits to see if we are attentive to ideas and reflections or rather to the spirit itself, which appears through desires, motions, ardor or despondency, tranquility or anxiety, joy or sorrow, and other analogous spiritual movements. For it is in these motions much more clearly than

in thoughts that one can pass judgment on the soul and its quests.¹⁵

Such experiences had been the beginning of Ignatius' own conversion both in following the invitation of Jesus and in entering into the fullness of conversion and mature Christian life. The importance placed by Ignatius and Favre on affective experience in the understanding of the interior world of the spirit was highlighted by the chancellor of the archdiocese of Mainz when he described these early Jesuits as "masters of the affections" in spiritual things. More recently Johnston writes that "affectivity is the key to Ignatian discernment. Ignatius wants us to be aware of those deep, subliminal feelings that we ordinarily ignore."¹⁶ The primacy of such experiences is central to the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius writes: "When the one who is giving the Exercises perceives that the exercitant is not affected by any spiritual experiences, such as consolations and desolations, and that he is not troubled by different spirits, he ought to ply him with questions about the exercises."¹⁷

Ignatius and Favre took inner affective experiences seriously. Their insistence upon the importance of such experiences became even more focused in their practice of spiritual direction:

. . . in certain persons, despite contemplations, numerous prayers varied with all sorts of spiritual exercises, it is almost impossible to grasp the diversity of spirits: they believe themselves to be always impelled by one and the same spirit with more or less intensity. . . . Still others, especially pious people who have practiced the Christian life for a long time and have kept themselves from sin, do not show signs of the good and evil spirits because they neither have thoughts foreign to the true and the good, nor manifestly disordered affections. However, holy as they may be, lead them to examine themselves on a higher degree of perfection in their lives and conduct--then you will see these two spirits appear, one of which is the source of strength and the other of weakness, one of light and the other of darkness, the one of justice and the other of degradation: that is to say, the good spirit and its opposite.¹⁸

Through their awareness of their own interior affective experiences these men came to know that spirits of good and evil are present within us, that we have a great capacity both for good and for evil. In this Ignatius came to recognize that human experiences of joy and desolation, of enthusiasm and depression, of light and darkness, are not just human emotions which vary

like the wind in a storm, but are the means by which we recognize the movements within our spirit stirred by the Spirit of Jesus. It would seem that Ignatius would concur with Henri Nouwen in describing the preparation of one who would minister in the spirit:

The first and most basic task required of the minister of tomorrow is to clarify the immense confusion which can arise when people enter this new internal world. . . . [We must] enter ourselves first of all into the center of our existence and become familiar with the complexities of our inner lives. As soon as we feel at home in our own house, discover the dark corners as well as the light spots, the closed doors as well as the drafty rooms, our confusion will evaporate, our anxiety will diminish, and we will become capable of creative work. . . . The man who can articulate the movements of his inner life, who can give names to his varied experiences, need no longer be a victim of himself, but is able slowly and consistently to remove the obstacles that prevent the spirit from entering.¹⁹

B. Interior Experience Arises from Personal History

Alternating affective experiences of the interior world do not just happen to us; they affect us deeply in our spirit where we suffer and undergo purification. They touch into our history, our personality, and the choices we have made in our lives. They are part of the fabric of our human existence. Because of undue stress on mystical experiences and a desire for instantaneous change, we can often lose sight of the very human dimensions of conversion--that Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted immediately after the confirming experience of baptism, that Paul spent years in the Arabian desert after his experience at Damascus. Even tremendous experiences of God do not exempt a person from entering into his or her own desert and wandering in it for years. In fact, it may be that such luminous experiences are the beginning of a conversion process.

This kind of conversion experience calls us to and emphasizes the importance of the experiences of life through which we learn and become perfected. They do not call us to turn away from life but to enter more fully and deeply into our own humanity with all its ambiguities. Thus, experiences of failure, of increasing age and frustration, of dreams unrealized, ideals gone stale, of separation, divorce, loss of job, sickness, and the like are often the catalysts which lead us into and are a significant part of conversion experiences. These experiences put us in touch with limitation,

with poverty of spirit, with the possible idols we have created in our lives. Through these realizations we can begin to desire forgiveness and fuller life. The importance and integral part of these human experiences in conversion can be lost when undue emphasis is placed on extraordinary mystical experience or when asceticism substitutes for the fullness of life to which we are called. Asceticism can be a convenient cover for the fears that beset us when we are called to move within, as if asceticism can exempt individuals from the painful process of learning to care, to listen, to live, to love--in other words, to come to the fullness of perfection.²⁰

The affective experiences which were part of Ignatius' conversion arose from his own personal history, personality, and choices. In speaking about the personal crisis of goals and meaning which are part of this second conversion, Gerald O'Collins writes about Ignatius' journey:

His autobiography exemplifies the hollowness, longing, pain, desperation and other feelings that can people the mind during a second journey. . . . Ignatius' midlife journey involved a crisis of goals and meaning. The journey's end loomed up only after long searching. The goal was neither seen nor even suspected at the outset. He was seventeen years on the road before he reached his destination. At times a sense of meaninglessness tortured the pilgrim. Ignatius recalls the "harsh thought" that deeply troubled him during the stay at Manresa. Had he chosen his own insane nightmare? Or was he following a God-inspired dream? Tormented by scruples, he even felt the temptation to take his own life.²¹

It is important that Ignatius referred to those years as a time of pilgrimage when he was asked to write his life story. The trials, uncertainty, searching, dead ends, and rootlessness of the travel from Loyola to Rome were indications of what was occurring interiorly. Despite the experiences at Loyola and Manresa, Ignatius' pilgrim story contains crises of emotions and feelings, loneliness and depression. It tells about the homelessness of the pilgrim. Oftentimes it seems that these aspects of his life and journey have been inappropriately overshadowed by undue stress on his mystical experiences, and often these experiences have been exaggerated as if Ignatius knew at Manresa many of the things that would occur later. Ignatius experienced and knew alternations of affections, helplessness, and littleness; through these he came to know himself and God. The intensity of these experiences is expressed in a summary statement by De Guibert:

[The] beginnings were relatively calm in their austerity.

There soon followed a period of stormy alternations of desolation and consolation, a tempest of intensive scruples which swept him on to the temptation of suicide, and finally a series of signal graces which transformed him into "another man." Ignatius himself clearly distinguishes these three facts but without any precise statement about their chronological succession. Neither does he explain their connection with the two serious illnesses he had at Manresa. The only thing that seems certain is that the group of great mystical favors came after his interior trials.²²

It seems that we, like Christians in every age, need to be brought back to the realization that God calls us and brings us to this deeper conversion in and through our ordinary life experiences, especially in our relationships. The Epistle to the Hebrews, written later than other New Testament writings, was addressed to those Christians who had waited for the Parousia and were disillusioned and discouraged that it seemed too long delayed. The experiences of waiting brought out the place of ordinary human living for spiritual maturation and conversion. This epistle insists that Jesus is human like ourselves, and tempted, who had to be perfected in the experiences of human life.

Since all children share the same blood and flesh, he too shared equally in it. . . . For it was not the angels he took to himself; he took to himself descent from Abraham. It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy highpriest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted (Heb. 2:14-18).

During his life on earth, he offered up prayers and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to save him out of death, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard. Although he was Son, he learned to obey through suffering (Heb. 5:7-8).

Temptation, prayers and entreaties, crying out with tears, living at the edge of death, learning to listen in the school of experience and suffering are experiences which lead to compassion. They also enable a person to minister to others who are tempted. In our experience we must come to know the Jesus of Nazareth who stood crying at the grave of a friend so that others recognized his love, who needed his friends with him in his loneliness and suffering, who enjoyed sharing a meal, and who cried out in pain and abandonment. These experiences in which Jesus became our high priest are those that bring Christians to priesthood. William Johnston describes these experiences as

penetrating to even deeper layers of the psyche than psychoanalysis. And . . . it is healing anxieties, neuroses, sexual problems, addictions of all kinds. It is effecting an astonishing inner freedom.

The old authors claimed that the tempest is unavoidable. No one acquires virtue without struggle. No one possesses courage who has not felt fear; no one possesses peace who has not felt conflict; no one possesses chastity who has not felt inordinate sexuality; no one can say he or she loves who has not been tempted to hate; no one knows strength who has not felt weakness. . . . Only by coming to the verge of despair can one swing back to the pinnacle of hope.²³

We have explored to some extent the importance of interior affective experiences within one's own human history, personality, and choices. Let us now consider what is occurring in the conversion process. It is not primarily behavioral change or socialization, but a reaching within to the vital source of one's own unique life. Temptations and affective changes which occur are not from without but from within; these become a very personal journey and a very personal anguish, a crisis of meaning which brings on suffering of spirit.

Often the beginnings of conversion are similar to the experience of Elijah who had worked so zealously for the Lord and his temple. "He was afraid and fled for his life. . . . He went on into the wilderness, a day's journey, and sitting under a furze bush wished he were dead. 'Yahweh,' he said, 'I have had enough. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors'" (1 Kings 19:3-5). Elijah finds questions arising within him about the meaning of his life, of his choices, of his commitments. Past loyalty and zeal are of no help, knowledge becomes an empty mockery, and prayer seems sterile and fruitless. As with Elijah, so with ourselves. It is not suffering happening to us, but suffering within us that cries out for release. We long that suffering should pass from us. There is an awareness of and a dying to the inauthentic within us, to that which is not lived, to darkness and light, to freedom and unfreedom, to the heart of stone. Such experiences lead us more deeply into ourselves and our own history. They call us to explore our inner house which until now we so successfully camouflaged or hid. We begin a winding journey through the various layers of opposites and contradictions which can be a scandal to us but which grow within us. We journey until we come to our true self, the self who will live eternal life.

St. Theresa of Avila writes of the need to find this treasure of our

true self as part of the journey to mature Christian experience:

Since in some way we can enjoy heaven on earth, be brave in begging the Lord to give us His grace in such a way that nothing will be lacking through our own fault; that He show us the way and strengthen the soul that it may dig until it finds this hidden treasure. The truth is that the treasure lies within our very selves.²⁴

These alternations of affections lead to a crisis of meaning in our life and become a suffering of spirit on the way to our true self whom God created. All of us know these experiences; not everyone pays heed to them. Jean Daniélou writes that mystical knowledge "is the realization by man of his deepest being, of what God meant to achieve in creating him. 'The glory of God is living man, and the life of man is the vision of God,' writes St. Irenaeus. So it is by no means a question of exceptional reality, but on the contrary, of the realization by man of his true being."²⁵

PART II. CONVERSION EMERGES FROM SELF-KNOWLEDGE

True self-knowledge, the knowledge of one's true self, is discovered in the alternations of emotions and feelings which bring about suffering of spirit. We need, therefore, to explore the meaning and implications of this kind of self-knowledge so essential for deeper covenant conversion. Such exploration seems helpful not only to allay the fear and anxiety accompanying this journey, but also because self-knowledge has not been highly regarded in more recent spirituality.

A. Pathways to God: Models from Scripture and the Fathers

In search of an image or symbol which captures the flavor of this affective conversion, we can turn to the Fathers of the early Church. These consider the Exodus experience as a paradigm of conversion to mature Christian living and completion of the response to the call made in baptism. Individuals are led out of bondage and unfreedom into a desert and after wandering there for some time are finally brought to a new life and homeland. What every desert traveler knows becomes for the Fathers a description of their own interior affective experiences of conversion.

The desert or wilderness often symbolizes a spiritual condition of being lost, lost in an inhospitable place, so lost that one can be near to despair.

There is no water in the desert, and human life is precarious, indeed almost impossible. An individual in the desert is alone, isolated; his life is in great danger. Whenever the desert appears in myths, it refers to a place or state of stagnation, where everything is arid, where nothing can grow. The desert is barren, stony, subject to extremes of heat and cold. The only living things there are thorns and thistles, poisonous serpents and stinging insects.²⁶ The journey into the spiritual desert involves alternating experiences of wasteland and oasis, aridity and fullness, darkness and light, resistance and compliance, unbelief leading to idolatry and new belief expressing wonder and thanksgiving. What is experienced in desert terrain corresponds to the inner reality. Within oneself the personal limit situations of darkness, sterility, doubt, discouragement, disillusionment, resistance, and temptation are discovered: the realities which accompany a personal crisis of meaning. It is through these experiences that we are led into our own desert places where we are sure that nothing can grow and be alive and holy. Yet it is these very desert places which must be touched into fullness of life. Ignatius realized that the desert begins only at the limits of a person's living faith, hope, and love; at the boundaries of self. This confusing and vulnerable place is where God continually calls us to our Exodus journey; it is also here that Evil attempts to thwart the work of the Spirit. Ignatius maintains, it is "there he attacks and tries to take us by storm."²⁷

This affective conversion confronts the opposites and contradictions within the heart of stone in our bodies and brings about the deeper and more essential conversion, the transformation of self. It is in dying to the self we know that we are reborn to the self which is fully alive. Grappling with the radical transformation that occurs in this second conversion, spiritual writers have used various images to communicate the meaning of Scriptural death and rebirth images. St. Paul speaks about the "old man" and the "new man," those who are born of flesh and those born of spirit, those who are immature and those who are mature. The Fathers related the need for transformation to original sin and its effects in us. Following Paul's example in Romans 5 concerning Adam and Christ, the Fathers referred to the image and likeness of God in which we were created. Through original sin the image of God which each person uniquely is was buried deep in his own spirit, and the full likeness was lost. St. Bernard uses this imagery in writing that through

"the Fall, man lost the likeness, or full likeness, of his Maker, but retained the image which can never be destroyed: that is, he retains the faculties (reason, will, memory) or qualities (simplicity, eternity, liberty) by which he resembles God, but has lost the proper use of them. In truly knowing himself, man discovers that he is a defaced image."²⁸

This kind of understanding leads us to search within ourselves for the unique "image" or "word" of God which we are. The journey is not exterior but interior. It is not an attempt to live up to ideals which may inspire us, but a search for the treasure that is hidden in our very selves, as St. Theresa of Avila insists. According to the Fathers we leave a false self, a defaced image with which we are very familiar, in order to find the image, the word, of God hidden in the depths of our spirit. Each person is a unique "word" of God called by the Word to become an adopted son or daughter of the Father. Just as there was a Peter in Simon and Paul in Saul, so each individual's true name, image, word is hidden in the spirit to be revealed and expressed.

More recently Thomas Merton has used the notion of the "true self in God" as opposed to the "false self of egocentric desires." He writes about the pilgrimage to God in which the self that begins the journey, the self we thought ourselves to be, begins to discover its limits, its affections, its falseness. Along the journey of discovery, this self begins to die "until in the end 'no one' is left. This 'no one' is our true self. . . . It is this self in God, the self bigger than death yet born of death. It is the self the Father forever loves."²⁹ Again, for Merton this is a matter of waiting and allowing our true self to open to us:

The inner self is as secret as God and, like him, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession. It is a life that cannot be held or studied as object, because it is not "a thing." It is not reached and coaxed forth from hiding by any process under the sun, including meditation. All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of its presence.³⁰

Such images are found in almost every religion to indicate the deep transformation of self that conversion involves. The other common thread is that this new self is to be found within. It involves a very personal struggle, temptation, dark night, or death. What can most prevent such conversion or be

an obstacle to it is to look outside self and attempt to live up to external ideals and expectations. When individuals attempt to find the ground of their identity solely in doing things and living up to society's roles, they unwittingly promote a false self. Whatever these ideals and expectations involve--being priest, Jesuit, teacher, or missionary--they can become obstacles to a deeper conversion. Often individuals are too fearful to let go of their own creations and to allow their true self and God to touch them.

In this movement from the false self to the true self in God, the spiritual masters of the early Church articulated a three-fold path toward God in conversion. This is a common teaching which runs through much spirituality but with varying degrees of emphasis. St. Bernard "describes the progress of the soul as passage through three levels of truth. The first of these, the truth of self, begins the process which ends with the ecstatic knowledge of God."³¹ If we are to find God, we must begin by knowing self at an affective, personal level. "Confrontation with the self in its sinfulness is the basis for contact with the divine. . . . It provides the necessary grounding for our ascents to God, without which we are liable to stumble or fail altogether."³² Thus, the first pathway and level of truth is the truth of myself as sinner. This awareness deepens with time and becomes increasingly interior until the virtue of true humility arises within me like sap in a tree. How far this reality is from countless "acts" of humility!

From this first level of truth, the individual passes directly and inevitably into a second path, which is the knowledge and truth of others. "The soul that is perfectly aware of its misery realizes that all other men share its condition. . . . As the awareness of personal misery reaches its deepest point, it is transformed into compassion: the individual realizes his communion with his larger self, the mass of humanity."³³ Knowledge of the truth of others is the gradually growing personal recognition that I am like those individuals and groups toward whom I experience prejudice, intolerance, and repugnance; these women and men of different races, colors, or personalities are, in reality, like myself.

"These two stages lead to the third, that of rapture, in which the soul is illumined with the truth of God."³⁴ Experiential knowledge of God brings peace, joy, and ineffable consolation. At this third level of truth Jesus of Nazareth is recognized as Lord, and individuals realize the mission of Jesus which they are called to share.

Reflecting on this triple pathway of conversion, written about by St. Bernard, we find:

At the first level, the soul realizes its need and begins to long for the salvation which can come from God alone. As the soul passes to the second degree of truth and learns that many others share its condition, this sense of neediness deepens. Along with the awareness of need, however, grows a sense of relationship; the soul becomes less anxious to pursue its own advantage, and seeks the things of God rather than its own will. At the end, completely purified, the soul is ready for union.³⁵

B. Affective Self-Knowledge Arises from Experience of Opposites

The kind of self-knowledge necessary for this conversion is confrontation with the self in its sinfulness. Felt knowledge, *sentir*, places us squarely in the midst of our own misery and bondage to sin and the deep sinfulness that threads our lives. We discover the limits of our faith in our sweaty palms, of our hope in our plans and schemes that preclude failure, of our love in our possessiveness. We may discover that we have never allowed the love we preach to touch us; our preaching begins to sound empty and abstract. We may talk about living abundantly and find we have circumscribed our lives to such a degree that we merely exist and mark time waiting for some vague future. We preach the cross and avoid the pains and sufferings of living in relationship. Here we concretely know ourselves as sinners. We experience our own misery and disorder. We are in touch with evil and how deeply it can touch us. Our fears become monstrous, our anxiety turns to a sullen depression, and our fury lashes out with the vengefulness of an angered god. We begin to know the rootedness of falsehood and evil within us.

However, according to those early spiritual guides, "we should not flee from the evil within us, because we must pass through it in order to reach the Father of mercies. Hence we must focus, in a certain fashion, on our iniquities: we must confront ourselves as sinners and use this experience as a springboard to the knowledge of God."³⁶ Such an attitude insists that to deal with sin and sinfulness is not just a process of purification to be gone through before coming into contact with God. Rather, he is present in the process itself; this is where I most truly meet God.

St. Ignatius is very much within this tradition. The self to be known during the course of the Spiritual Exercises is a self in conflict between

opposites: light and darkness, freedom and unfreedom, life and death. In the *Autograph Directories* the director is advised to help the exercitant in the Foundation "to *feel* the difficulty involved in using indifferently the means God our Lord has given us."³⁷ This is certainly not an intellectual exercise. It is an affective awareness with one's interior senses of the struggles between desires and reality, between freedoms and unfreedoms. It is to be in touch with the weeds and wheat growing together in the field of one's life. It is the kind of knowledge we have when we discover our own inconsistencies and disorder. Also, during the First Week the director is reminded that "the second exercise of this week is not provided in order that he [the exercitant] might begin to examine his conscience in order to confess, but rather in order that seeing indistinctly [by rough estimate] the many sins he has committed and his evil past life, he might achieve horror and bring forth contrition."³⁸ The aim of these exercises is not to reinforce some kind of superego guilt. They appeal to a much deeper place within us, to the level of conscience where true penance can arise and I can stand before God without repression. It is of note that guilt is not included among the gifts that Ignatius would have us ask for. Rather, he recommends that we ask for shame and confusion, for growing and intense sorrow and tears so that we can come to true knowledge of ourselves. How often it happens that these gifts are prayed for during a retreat, but go unrecognized as gifts when they arise in our daily, ordinary lives and relationships. One can wonder, too, how comfortable many directors would be with individuals who were sad and sorrowful, ashamed and confused! From Ignatius' own directions, it seems he wants individuals to touch into that place of personal misery and disorder where they affectively experience their own defaced image of God. Here is a place from which tears spontaneously arise if the heart of stone is not too impenetrable. Such self-knowledge is personal and intimate. In the same *Directory* Ignatius advises that the First Week could be given in a shorter time to "a person, as has been said, [who is] spiritual and who has wept for his sins." Here Ignatius rediscovers "a coherent doctrine among the fathers, the Christian gurus. And included in this common doctrine is the insistence that without tears that pour profusely for days on end there is no true enlightenment."⁴⁰ Ignatius' aim in the early exercises was to destroy a certain psychological preoccupation

with oneself as saint or sinner. Ignatius desired exercitants to find the place of true sin and sinfulness within themselves whence true penance could arise, rather than to reinforce false idealizations and expectations which cut them off from their concrete history.⁴¹

It would also seem that part of the genius of the *Spiritual Exercises* as an aid to those experiencing conversion in their own lives is Ignatius' understanding of the importance of self-knowledge. The typical and powerful Ignatian meditations or contemplations seem to break the rhythm of focusing on the mysteries of God and Christ and to lower the retreatant's eyes to self, to an interior condition and experience, to personal concrete reality. In the meditation on the Two Standards it is not so much a question of which standard I will fight under, but how these two opposing forces are present and living in me.

It is helpful to recall that the true self we are to discover, as the false self disintegrates, is the image or word of God that we uniquely are but which is hidden deep within. On the path to the experience of this self, I encounter not only the false self which gradually loses its controls, but also many different selves or parts of my personality. These are aspects which I become aware of when I seem to act and think and feel differently in different situations. These are the many selves I created or rejected within me as I was promoting the self which must die to be reborn. In a striking passage in *The Divine Milieu*, Teilhard de Chardin articulates such a discovery:

We must try to penetrate our most secret self, and examine our being from all sides. Let us try, patiently, to perceive the ocean of forces to which we are subjected and in which our growth is, as it were, steeped. . . . And so, for the first time in my life perhaps (although I am supposed to meditate every day!), I took the lamp and, leaving the zone of everyday occupations and relationships where everything seems clear, I went down into my inmost self, to the deep abyss whence I feel dimly that my power of action emanates. But as I moved further and further away from the conventional certainties by which social life is superficially illuminated, I became aware that I was losing contact with myself. At each step of the descent a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me. And when I had to stop my exploration because the path faded from beneath my steps, I found a bottomless abyss at my feet. . . . At that moment . . . I felt the distress characteristic of a particle adrift in the universe, the

distress which makes human wills founder daily under the crushing number of living things and stars. And if someone saved me, it was hearing the voice of the Gospel . . . speaking to me from the depth of the night: *ego sum, noli timere* (It is I, be not afraid).⁴²

When Teilhard meets new persons within himself whose names he has forgotten or never known and who are beyond his conscious control, he is in touch with those parts of his personal interior which need healing and liberation on the road to his true self. These are often parts which we judged unworthy and denied. There can be no coming to the true self without including all that God has created and sustained in us: our feelings, emotions, ideals, sexuality, aggression, our history. In a very personal and concrete letter, G. K. Chesterton writes about the person he became aware of in the anguish of self-discovery:

Private troubles [are] what I am feeling most intensely myself. I am in a state now when I feel a monstrous charlatan, as if I wore a mask and were stuffed with cushions, whenever I see anything about the public G.K.C.; it hurts me; for though the views I express are real, the image is horribly unreal compared with the real person who needs help just now. . . . I am not troubled about a great fat man who appears on platforms and in caricatures, even when he enjoys controversies on what I believe to be the right side. I am concerned about what has become of a little boy whose father showed him a toy theatre, and a schoolboy whom nobody ever heard of, with his brooding on doubts and dirt and daydreams of crude conscientiousness so inconsistent as to [be] near to hypocrisy; and all the morbid life of the lonely mind of a living person with whom I have lived. It is that story, that so often came near to ending badly, that I want to end well.⁴³

We similarly meet our own inner selves on our journey. We must take them seriously, these selves revealed in affections, dreams, and imagination, and let them lead us to the unique word God spoke at our creation. If we do take them seriously, we may be able to identify as clearly as Chesterton has done those parts of ourselves in need of healing and salvation. It is through these affections, dreams, and memories that the living word in us can make itself known, can knock loudly at the door of our consciousness until we pay attention. Through these movements we can awaken to ourselves. Ignatius and many other spiritual guides speak of the initial part of this journey as coming out of a long sleep. It is as if our consciousness--very active

and successful with outer, even spiritual, things--had in reality been asleep to the wealth of the interior. However, as the living word makes its presence known to us, so does sin, which is also living in us, as St. Paul says. In Romans 7 he vividly describes the inward struggle of opposites within us. Both the word of life and the word of death are dynamic and active within us. If we are to find the living word of self, we must touch, explore, and acknowledge the sin living deeply within us. It is in the self-knowledge arising out of our struggle that we are aware of sinfulness, disorder, and unfreedom and begin to long for the liberation promised by Jesus. It is in these kinds of life experiences much more than in not living up to external expectations and laws that we discover the roots of our sin. We confront ourselves in our sinfulness and in that confrontation also discover the possibility of new life.

The kind of self-knowledge these spiritual guides speak about is not an analytical knowledge. It is an affective, intimate understanding of self. It is the kind of felt knowledge we have when we desire to care but honestly do not find ourselves caring despite sincere intentions, protestations, and actions. It is the kind of knowledge (*sentir*) we have when we would like to love freely but find ourselves possessive or clinging or dominating, afraid even to admit that such swings of emotion are ours. It is the knowledge we have when we want to trust but find we do not allow ourselves to reach out to others nor accept their touch. It is the knowledge we have when we realize that we plan and organize creativity and spontaneity so that we are never surprised or lonely. It is the knowledge we have in affective movements, in dreams that haunt us with hidden but important meaning, in painful memories we tend to push out of our awareness. It is the kind of knowledge which touches a place in us where we know that something is happening and is important, but often we do not know what it is or how to handle it. This knowledge is different from experiences which may bring a kind of joy or irritation, but do not reach that inner place which knows instinctively that here is personal meaning. It is a knowledge very close to us and found most often when we have affective relationships, relationships which go beyond the ordinary, everyday bumping into people. It is the kind of knowledge we have when we reflect and stay with these affective reactions and responses.

This kind of self-knowledge is very different from the knowledge I have

about myself from psychological tests, or from interviews in which someone tells me about myself, or from books. Many people seem to know much about themselves, but it does not penetrate to the place where it becomes self-knowledge; it does not touch them. They can go through lists of sins and virtues, of personal and psychological characteristics. They can recount stories and events from the past, but there is much recall without remembering. Their recountings are often curiously impersonal, as if they were talking not to a friend or director but to some distant, safe observer. They may speak much about themselves, but do not communicate themselves. They may tell stories that are truly moving, but tell them with a smile and a laugh and a distance that is sometimes belied by the pain in their eyes. They seem unaware that there is a difference between knowing about oneself and affective self-knowledge. As listeners we almost instinctively know the difference; and yet, in our own regard, we often need a companion and friend to be with us so that we can be with ourselves, in touch with our own experience--so that we can remember rather than recall.

C. Self-Knowledge Leads to Personal Encounter with God, the Father of Jesus

This kind of affective self-knowledge is not learned alone, though it is necessary to be alone for self-reflection. It is learned in relationships, in the experiences of life, in the journey of conversion. St. Paul says: "My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognize what is best" (Phil. 1:9). This is also the kind of self-knowledge that is learned in temptation and the testing of love, as Jesus learned it. "Unless you have been tested by various temptations . . . you can never obtain from God spiritual self-knowledge, let alone the ability to tell and advise others."⁴⁴ Through temptation and the purification of love, both of which call us beyond our safe boundaries, we come to know ourselves and God. John of the Cross explicitly states in *The Dark Night of the Soul* that God is teaching us this kind of self-knowledge and that this is the primary aim of such purification:

The first and chief benefit that this dry and dark night of contemplation causes is the knowledge of self and of one's own misery. Besides the fact that all the favors God imparts to the soul are ordinarily enwrapped in this knowledge, the

aridities and voids of the faculties in relation to the abundance previously experienced, and the difficulty encountered in the practice of virtue make the soul recognize its own lowliness and misery, which was not apparent in the time of its prosperity. . . . As a result the soul recognizes the truth about its misery, of which it was formerly ignorant.⁴⁵

In John's understanding, those periods of darkness, pain, and suffering which we experience are not just trials to be endured or offered up, but a very active way of coming to self-knowledge, to penance, and to the knowledge of God. He writes, again, "that self-knowledge flows first from this dry night, and that from this knowledge as from its source proceeds the other knowledge of God. Hence St. Augustine said to God: 'Let me know myself Lord, and I will know You' (*Soliloq.*, lib. 2, c. 1). For as the philosophers say, one extreme is clearly known by the other."⁴⁶

St. Theresa of Avila is equally insistent upon the importance of self-knowledge: "It is a shame and unfortunate that through our own fault we don't understand ourselves or know who we are . . . We seldom consider the precious things that can be found in this soul, or who dwells within it, or its high value."⁴⁷ Her own experience had taught her the value of such knowledge and she communicates this in her own vivid style:

If it [the soul] is in the room of self knowledge! How necessary this room is--see that you understand me--even for those whom the Lord has brought into the very dwelling place where He abides. For never, however exalted the soul may be, is anything else fitting for it; nor could it be even were the soul to so desire. . . . Without it everything goes wrong. . . . I don't know if this has been explained well. Knowing ourselves is something so important that I wouldn't want any relaxation ever in this regard, however high you may have climbed into the heavens. While we are on earth nothing is more important to us than humility. So I repeat that it is good, indeed very good, to try to enter first into the room where self-knowledge is dealt with rather than fly off to other rooms. This is the right road, and if we can journey along a safe and level path, why should we want to fly? Rather, let's strive to make more progress in self-knowledge. In my opinion we shall never completely know ourselves if we don't strive to know God.⁴⁸

Later she becomes even more explicit on the relationship between self-knowledge and the knowledge of God. Self-knowledge is not just a necessary foundation for holiness, but an integral part of God's gradual self-revelation to us. She writes: "Great favors will never be given to those who desire them,

because before granting them God gives a deep self-knowledge. For how will he who has such desires understand the truth that he is being granted a very great favor at not being in hell?"⁴⁹

Thus, self-knowledge is a prerequisite for coming to know God, but it is not of our own doing; it is the work of the Spirit, who teaches this kind of affective self-knowledge so that we can know God and the true self, the "word" which the Father spoke in creating us. Perhaps Jesus in the desert, experiencing very real and personal temptations in himself, continued to grow in acceptance of the Word that he was and embraced more deeply the humanity, the body, which had been fitted for him. This experience is indicated in Philippians 2. We in our temptations come to self-knowledge and embrace more fully our humanity, our heart of flesh, the "word" spoken in our creation. In this, we, too, come more and more to know the Father of Jesus as he reveals himself in ourselves.

For us creatures, however, this kind of self-knowledge is also a knowledge of the defaced image, the distorted word. It leads us to the virtue of penance, for God reveals himself as a Father of mercy with a heart for our misery. The virtue of penance is not an act that we make, but a strength rising up from within us, from the affective knowledge of our misery and disorder. With penance one finds the "courage to face the fear of God and the truth of one's own existence without 'repressions'--the only way true responsibility for one's past can be assumed, and the grace-given readiness to allow oneself to be convicted of sin by God's revealing word, by destruction of pharisaic self-righteousness."⁵⁰ Unless we descend into the desert of self-knowledge and experience the temptations that accompany our embracing of incarnateness more fully, we will never tap the deep well of penance that yields salutary tears. Nor will we experience the touch of the Father's hand in forgiveness deep within our hearts as promised in Jeremiah and fulfilled in Jesus.

The importance of this self-knowledge is highlighted today when many are searching for a more adult spirituality woven of the threads of experience from their ordinary lives. The importance of this understanding of the movement toward God is not so much that it is to become an agenda for spiritual development. Rather it is to help individuals to recognize the movement of the Spirit in experience, something which may not have been considered to be

part of the journey of conversion. Perhaps this awareness will allow individuals to enter more fully into the desert of their experiences, without guilt or unnecessary resistance, in order to come to self-knowledge, the virtue of penance, and an experience of mercy and of the merciful Father of Jesus.)

Understanding self-knowledge as the beginning and essential step toward the experience of God is even more important today. Such a beginning step is the opposite of that found in much recent spirituality influenced by the "dogmatic" theology described by Lonergan. More recent spirituality often began with God. Individuals tried to love God with their whole mind, heart, and soul. This love for God was a touchstone. Such love should necessarily overflow into love for our neighbor, into attempts to love and to be charitable to our neighbor. Finally, there was the advice to forget self. A fear of too much introspection and of psychological preoccupation with self gave rise to the distortion of the common teaching of earlier spiritual guides. This inversion of the pathway and journey to God often resulted in mediocrity and an out-of-touch-ness with self and others. It often promoted an increased emphasis on unnecessary asceticism which can never substitute for the living asceticism of the school of experience. In such a school to live, to care, to love, and to come to the truth of one's own existence is to come to true compassion.⁵¹ The implications of such an inversion are far-reaching. If individuals have not entered into the desert of their own misery, that place of affective spiritual self-knowledge, then the God they seek to love and serve is not a God experienced, but a God made up of the truths of theology and their own needs and imaginations. Theological descriptions of God would assume a primary importance over the simple, deep, and profound experience in which one knows God. It is of interest that Jesus brought together the great commandment in Deuteronomy to love God completely and the commandment in Leviticus to love one's neighbor as oneself. Mark's recounting seems to touch this best: "The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (Mark 12:32-34). Note that the second commandment requires that we love our neighbor with the same love as we love ourselves,

not as we love God. Unless we can enter into our own limited self with all of its contradictions, inconsistencies, and temptations and so find our true self and God, we may be unable to accompany others who are experiencing such temptations in themselves. Certainly, we cannot accompany them to the heights of the love of God, as the author of *The Cell of Self-Knowledge* insists. To companion and to have compassion toward others, we must be with those same experiences in ourselves along our own conversion journey.

D. Affective Knowledge of Self and of Christ as the Heart of the Spiritual Exercises

The entire structure and dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* reflect Ignatius' radical conversion, which involved a transformation of heart such as we have been describing, and they are aimed at producing it also in others. Such transformation involves self-knowledge, darkness, and turmoil--in other words, temptation in the very center of one's personality and the experience of mercy which are preliminary to a fundamental sense of forgiveness. Earlier in this paper we have discussed the place of affective self-knowledge and the importance of various interior movements. Let us now look at an example of this kind of conversion in Ignatius' experience with Pierre Favre. That Ignatius placed very high priority on experiential self-knowledge seems clear in this relationship. After years of giving exercises and even recruiting followers in Spain who were not to prove lasting companions, Ignatius used all this experience with the young man from France with whom he lodged in Paris. It is clear from Favre's *Memoriale* that coming to knowledge of himself was one of the principal benefits of his earliest conversations and contacts with Ignatius, who companioned him in the darkness and temptation involved.

I was engaged in conversation with him [Ignatius], at first about external matters and later about spiritual matters. Since we were living together in the same apartment and sharing the same food and the same purse, he became my spiritual teacher and showed me how to reach an awareness of the divine will *and my own*. . . . May God in his divine mercy grant me the grace to remember and contemplate the gifts that our Lord conferred upon me at that time through this man. *The greatest of these gifts was that I was able for the first time to understand my conscience*, with all the temptations and scruples that had held me captive for so long that I did not really know and could not figure out how to find relief from them. . . . About four years passed in this way, and every day I made spiritual progress.

And I was tried in the many fires and waters of temptation for a good number of years, almost up to the time I left Paris. And I was tried with empty pride in which our Lord gave me great knowledge of myself and my defects, permitting me to search into them deeply with interior anguish; and thus, by his grace, he gave me great peace in this respect.⁵²

It is not hard to recognize the understanding that Pierre's spiritual teacher had about the dynamics of the conversion process going on in his spirit. Realizing that God teaches self-knowledge through darkness, temptation, scruples, and anguish, Ignatius aided that process by helping Pierre to understand his own conscience. The importance of such understanding is further highlighted by the fact that this kind of relationship between Ignatius and Favre went on for four years. Only after that time and a sojourn in his home village for a good part of a year did Ignatius, upon Favre's return to Paris, allow him to make the Spiritual Exercises. It was at this time, too, that Ignatius included the Principle and Foundation in the *Spiritual Exercises* as a living reflection of the foundation in self-knowledge necessary for the conversion process.

This living example of Ignatius' way of proceeding with Favre underlines the dynamics of conversion discussed in this paper. Much recent writing about the *Spiritual Exercises* stressed the place of God and Christ in the plan of salvation so that the subjective place of the human person often became obscured. In a similar way, perhaps the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth was obscured in the fullness of his reality. The central place that the human being plays in the dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* has gotten attention recently:

The anthropocentric moment of the Exercises . . . centers upon the exercitant's self-discovery, self-presence, self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-possession and self-emptying in the light of the Mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Essential to the inner rhythm and dynamics of the Exercises is the exercitant's radical return to himself as subject, the active disposition of his entire person, his creative self-presence, his presence to his own deepest mystery as man. . . . Every exercise . . . sets in motion and fulfills, at least partially, his essential, basic thrust for self-identity, self-surrender and self-fulfillment. . . . The exercitant experiences what he is, who he is, and therefore discovers God's specific Will for him.⁵³

Both Ignatius' living example and Egan's exposition bring out the importance of the kind of radical self-knowledge acquired in deep affective

conversion. It was this self-knowledge which Favre discovered "with interior anguish." Ignatius, too, is convinced that such desolation can bring an individual to a true and undeniable confrontation with self and the Father of Jesus:

The third reason [for desolation] is because God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire and attain great devotions, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation; but that all this is the gift and grace of God our Lord. God does not wish us to build on the property of another, to rise up in spirit in a certain pride and vainglory and attribute to ourselves the devotion and other effects of spiritual consolation.⁵⁴

Ignatius' own practice and his understanding of the place of desolation demonstrate that this deep affective conversion was Ignatius' goal. That is why he permitted most Jesuits to present only the exercises of the First Week. Only those he supervised himself were allowed to companion individuals through the experiences of the full Exercises. How different that is from much practice today when some would not want to present the exercises of the First Week but consider themselves experts in the other three Weeks.

E. Conversion Is Often Accompanied by Resistance

Understanding the primary place and importance of self-knowledge on the pathway to the Father can be helpful in reducing feelings of guilt and distress. Nevertheless, such understanding does not exempt individuals from the pain of their own lived anger, fear, anxiety, depression, and sadness. Centered in our own misery we can taste, smell, and feel interiorly our helplessness and our need for liberation--the freedom promised to God's children. It is only in these realities that we can experience the merciful love of God, the only kind of love possible in such a situation.

Resistance is often a companion to these experiences of helplessness and meaninglessness. Resistance can take many different forms and has a variety of deceptions, all too often reinforced. William Connolly writes of these in regard to persons confronting their own darkness:

Resistance to entering the darkness takes different forms. "Life is hard enough," one person will say. "Why look for gloom?" Another fears he will become lost in introspection. Some think that entering darkness will mean concentrating on the "garbage" of their lives and believe that God wants

only healthy enjoyment for us. Others see entering darkness as self-pity, undermining the courage with which a person must face life. Underlying all these objections is primitive fear, sometimes conscious, but often so submerged as to be almost imperceptible. . . . The person moves in darkness from a sense of his fears, angers, and guilts, to a sense of his own insufficiency. At this point he may feel he has come into a denser darkness. He sees no sign of relief, nothing that offers hope.⁵⁵

St. Theresa, too, talks about the fears and resistances which can be experienced as one enters into the interior and "digs for the treasure that is there." She states that many people refuse to enter within because they think they will be "mired in the mire" of their miseries or, to use more contemporary language, in their poor self-image. She insists:

The fears come from our not understanding ourselves completely. They distort self-knowledge; and I am not surprised if we never get free from ourselves, for this lack of freedom from ourselves and even more, is what can be feared. So I say that we should set our eyes on Christ. . . . There we shall learn true humility and self-knowledge will not make one base and cowardly. . . . Terrible are the wiles and deceits used by the devil so that souls may not know themselves or understand their own paths.⁵⁶

Recognizing that the conversion experience can often touch this place of resistance and primitive fear, Theresa writes that "courage is necessary for this knowledge and for the many other graces given to the soul. And when there is humility, courage, in my opinion, is even more necessary for this knowledge of one's misery."⁵⁷

Along with this courage to remain with our darkness and disorder, there can spring up hope, even though hope seems impossible. Hope is the virtue of the traveler on the road to conversion, but it is a hope which allows us to stay in the darkness rather than lift our eyes to some future reward.

To meet it [hope], we have to descend into nothingness. And there we meet hope most perfectly, when we are stripped of our own confidence, our own strength, when we almost no longer exist. "A hope that is seen," says St. Paul, "is no hope." No hope. Therefore despair. To *see* your hope is to abandon hope.⁵⁸

In the endurance, the courage, and the darkness of the experiences of conversion, we learn not only self-knowledge but what the virtue of hope really is. St. Paul writes: "We can boast about our sufferings. These sufferings bring patience, as we know, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance

brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:3-6). Paul teaches us that hope is a virtue we discover within our spirit. This hope does not remove us from the anxieties of the struggle nor the fears which can overtake us. Neither does it provide a scenario of a favorable outcome. However, "we must be content to hope that we shall be saved--our salvation is not in sight, we should not have to be hoping if it were--but . . . we must hope to be saved since we are not saved yet, it is something we must wait for with patience" (Rom. 8:24-25).

PART III. MISSION ARISES FROM CONVERSION

In this kind of affective conversion, individuals experience the forgiveness and covenant spoken of in Jeremiah: "I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind" (Jer. 31:34). They also come to know themselves. This affective self-knowledge is like the knowing implied in the French word *connaître*, to be born with. Individuals become more united with the self, their unique "word." There is an inner spiritual marriage between the self which must be lost and the self("word") which must be found. There is a letting go of our own creation and an accepting of who we were created to be. In this experience of forgiveness and in knowing ourselves there is also a coming to know God. This is a birthing of God within us, as Meister Eckhart implies.⁵⁹ In this knowing of God we also know our "word," and in this knowing we discover mission--that the Word and all "words" are sent to proclaim the Good News of salvation which is the Father's love and providence. Many documents express this universal mission of all Christians: "The mission of Christ, in turn, gives rise to the mission shared by all Christians as members of the Church sent to bring all men and women the Good News of their salvation and that 'they may have life and have it to the full.'"⁶⁰ Thus, in the full richness of the conversion experience we find the experience of apostolic mission. The Apostles, in the forgiveness experienced through Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, saw themselves in a new way and embraced Jesus Christ as Lord. They were bound to him in a new way, and thus they discovered the meaning and depth of the words of mission which he had promised them from the beginning. Conversion is not a training camp for mission, but mission

is an integral and essential part of conversion experiences and is discovered within them.

A. Conversion Is the Source of Mission in the Gospels

When Jesus tells the apostles that he is sending them as the Father has sent him, it is possible to imagine an entire Trinitarian scenario in which the Son is commissioned to become man by the Father because of his great love for all. This is a true and mysterious reality which has inspired us Jesuits and others deeply. However, it is possible that such a scenario might blind us to Jesus' gradual coming to know himself and mission. It is also possible to consider Jesus of Nazareth's growing awareness of and acceptance of the mission which was his in living out the Word hidden in his spirit. The baptism and temptation of Christ would seem to be the root of his experience of mission. In the struggle with personal darkness and temptation in the desert, Jesus knew and accepted more fully the humanity and Word he was and in this knew and accepted his Father in a deeper way. Against the backdrop of growth in age and grace and wisdom, the baptism and temptation can be considered as Jesus' experience of being missioned. It was a twofold experience found both in baptism, which was initiation, and in temptation, in which self-knowledge was discovered and which brought about a greater union with the "Word" he is. Perhaps it is this fuller and deeper entrance into humanity that Paul writes of in Philippians 2:8: ". . . and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross." Thus, Jesus could experience his mission both in baptism and in the struggle of temptation. "Because he himself has been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). "Although he was son, he learnt to obey through suffering . . . and was acclaimed by God with the title of high priest of the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:9-10).

The temptation of the apostles occurred in all the events of Jesus' passion and death. Theirs was temptation not just as observers of what was taking place, but as participants. They shared in denial and abandonment, fear, disillusionment, and faintheartedness. These affections evoked memories of similar experiences in different periods of their lives so that the awareness of the rootedness of their sinfulness was deep and compelling. Their depression, fear, and heaviness of spirit were like a death:

And in those sad days when he was crucified and his body lay in the tomb, the disciples died also. They did not die physically; but there was a very real psychological and emotional death. Peter died; John died; Thomas died. The mother of Jesus died as she stood at the foot of the cross. They all died. And the two disciples who walked to Emmaus expressed the feelings of the group: "But we had hoped. . . ." (Luke 24:21).⁶¹

Even though he had tried to prepare them, Jesus realized that each one had to endure this darkness and death alone. In a moving way he says to Simon Peter, "Simon, Simon! Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). In their own deaths, they were scandalized in him but also in themselves. Gradually, through the power of the resurrection, they began to experience the forgiving love of mercy for their iniquity; their sin was not called to mind. It was in this forgiveness experience that they could recognize for the first time that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Through this shattering death a new relationship is born. . . . The disciples discovered that through their suffering and through the death of Jesus something new was born: a new relationship was born, a relationship of total indwelling. The barriers of separation and isolation had fallen down, giving place to a wonderful union, a mutual interiority and an extraordinary shared intimacy. Now the Risen Jesus was dwelling in them.⁶²

In this union they knew and embraced more fully their own true selves--Simon became Peter--and they discovered their mission. In their increasing experience of the Spirit of Jesus active in their own spirits, they came to know themselves and discovered the source of mission and apostolate. Conversion did not prepare the apostles to go, but if they would reflect on and be present to their conversion they would find themselves and their mission. The resurrection stories in John's Gospel are stories of self-discovery and mission. The unique and distinct stories of Mary, Thomas, and Peter relate an awareness not just of the Risen Jesus, but of themselves in their own particular sinful orientation. These stories are clustered around the sending commission related to forgiveness of sin. Thus, self-discovery and mission are both integral to the rich experience of their conversion.

This internal event of conversion is not its completion. Affective transformation brings new eyes and ears with which to see and hear and a heart of flesh to love with. In this transformation of capacities, the

apostles could love at a deeper level and recognize their being joined with Christ in his mission from the Father. However, the shape and form of this mission were unclear. The missioning was not just to preach the Good News but equally to listen to and hear the Spirit speaking in strange new ways and people--ways that broke through their own prejudices and understanding. They were open to and ready for continuing revelation of the Father in their experience. They were prepared to discover the will of the Father of Jesus in the needs and cries of those asking for freedom and salvation. This kind of conversion provides a heart that is alert not just to the cries of the poor, but to their anguish, loneliness, alienation and blessedness--the spirit of the poor calling to the apostles' spirit, both touched by the Spirit of Jesus. Thus, the people who heard the Good News helped to shape, define, concretize the mission and to reveal the will of the Father. The apostles were sent to preach and in this they discovered what Church was to be. It broke through many of their own assumptions which related Church to the synagogue and to the Jews. Their own transformed hearts were able to hear the Spirit speaking in the cries of the pagans, who in turn would help to give shape and form to the conversion-mission experience of the Resurrection.

Perhaps Peter best exemplifies this reality of the mission being specified by and the Father's will being discovered in the cries of strangers for freedom and reconciliation. The narrative of Peter's encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18) includes Peter's dream which he could only gradually understand, his growing realization "that God does not have favorites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:35). Yet such a realization is not sufficient when Cornelius first contacts Peter. Only as they are talking, both touched by the Spirit of Jesus, does Peter recognize Cornelius as a brother. "Could anyone refuse the water of baptism to these people, now they have received the Holy Spirit just as much as we have?" (Acts 10:47-48). But Peter has to defend his action to the Jews in Jerusalem and to overcome the prejudice about uncleanness. Having come to the realization that the Good News and baptism are for the pagan, he directly addresses his critics: "What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane" (Acts 11:10). We find the same theme in Peter's speech in Acts 15 concerning circumcision. This interplay of Peter's own experiences, his remembrance of what Jesus has said, and

the needs and spirit of Cornelius and new Christians provide a paradigm for the experience of mission being shaped and defined by others--our neighbors.

B. Mission Springs from Experience of Communion with Others

The Fathers and through them the spiritual masters had to become aware of their own experience of becoming mature Christians--of living the Christian life to its fullest. They reflected on their own lives and on the memory of Jesus of Nazareth, the man they, too, saw and heard about and touched. These two dynamics marked their understanding of being a mature Christian and of having a mission, which was perhaps for them more a matter of witness than of activity in the world. For these forerunners in the history of spiritual tradition, charity springs from the personal experience of communion with others discovered in the gradual conversion of self to God. It is a necessary extension and continuation of penance and humility arising from the confrontation with self in misery. In their articulation of the threefold path of the person toward God, the beginnings are with the kind of self-knowledge discussed above. The Christian, then, entering deeply into his own misery, comes to true self-knowledge and "passes directly, inevitably, into the second level, the truth of others. The soul that is perfectly aware of its misery realizes all other men share its condition. . . . As the awareness of personal misery reaches its deepest point, it is transformed into compassion: the individual realizes his communion with his larger self, the mass of humanity. . . . The encounter with the self is the first step away from the self and towards communion with the other."⁶³ Thus, charity (witness and mission) does not begin with God, but with the experience of solidarity and communion with others under the inspiration of God. In this learned experience, their own understanding of Jesus was the model and inspiration. Just as the Jesus of the hymn in Philippians took on our misery in order to be closer to us, so we must descend into ourselves to arrive at communion with others. Also, the Jesus of Hebrews 2 becomes "a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

The same had been true of the apostles. When they died in the passion and death of Jesus and in their own misery, they discovered their likeness

with all other men and women. Unlike the case of Elijah, to whom God revealed himself in a similar situation, the Father pointed to his Son whom they knew. In this experience they became their true selves and recognized Jesus of Nazareth as Lord. They found communion with others which gave meaning to the Eucharistic meal they had shared with Jesus. Thus, their mission was discovered not only in the commission of Jesus, but in the compassion of communion with others. It was this that allowed them to hear and integrate the cries of the poor for freedom, for liberation, for the life of the Spirit.

Thus, for the Fathers, mission was born in the deep experience of communality and solidarity with all people afflicted by the poverty of sinfulness and healed by the touch of the Spirit. All those toward whom we experience prejudice and intolerance--whether they be sinners (liars, thieves, or murderers) or just different (in color, sex, or lifestyle)--are all present within us. No longer can we say with a sigh of relief and thanksgiving that "there but for the grace of God go I," but we recognize soul brothers and sisters in all of these. Coming to know my neighbors, being born with them, and loving them as myself are found within the experiences of limitation, suffering, darkness, and misery which we share with all men and women. In sharing simple stories of life--of success and failure, of brokenness and love, of struggle and endurance--we begin to experience a communion which joins us and allows us to go out of ourselves to the others. This love for and communion with others does not come from the lofty vantage point of the Trinity nor from God's inestimable love for us. Rather, it is a love of mercy found within temptation and forgiveness, from the vantage point of the cross. This is not the cross of Christ, but the cross on which each man and woman crucifies self.⁶⁴ When Jesus admonishes us that what we do to others we do to him, he recognizes himself in them, he is in communion with them. To love others is not a test or proof of love for him, nor are we to love others because he does; it is in loving them that we are loving him.

On this solidarity discovered in sinfulness and forgiveness rest communion and compassion. As we begin to know ourselves and others, we discover that mission is not from a place of difference, strength, or love of God, but from a place of sameness, mercy, and compassion. Our mission comes from compassion, born of the passion of conversion, which preaches faith and

works for justice without losing faith and imposing personal injustice. William Connolly has some provocative insights into how darkness and temptation are a sharing in the mission of Jesus:

. . . it becomes increasingly clear that a strong desire to share in the mission of Jesus to the world does not develop without a prior experience of darkness. Such a desire can never be the product of a reasoning process. It can only result from experience of some kind, and the deeper the experience the more personally gripping the desire can be. There seems to be, then, reason for concluding that, in the milieu of the directed retreat, the sense of mission often does not develop because retreatants have not been receptive to the experience of darkness. To move one step further: lack of radical response to the social dimensions of Jesus' mission may be a result of retreatants' failure to be receptive to the experience of social darkness, their refusal, for instance, to let themselves be shaken and dispirited by social evil.⁶⁵

These words are true not only of the directed retreat, but also of the life of each person. It is, however, not just a question of entering darkness or of being shaken by social evil; the primary movement is to enter into oneself to discover the misery, injustice, and sinfulness which are part of ourselves. Here the misery can turn to compassion and give rise to mission which includes faith and justice.

This spiritual teaching of the Fathers joined with reflection on the far-flung activity of the apostles was present in the beginnings of the new form of religious life envisioned by Ignatius in the Society.

C. Ongoing Conversion Is the Foundation of Mission in the Society of Jesus

These reflections on conversion as the source of mission can provide a new perspective for contemplating our Jesuit vocation and apostolic renewal. Continual conversion is central to the mission of the individual Jesuit and the Society because it is central to the gospel and to Ignatius' experience which he shares with and facilitates in us through the *Spiritual Exercises*. In a way similar to that of the apostles, Ignatius gradually discovered himself joined with Christ in mission through the darkness and death of Manresa. Despite that initial experience, it was the experiences of the intervening years up to the founding of the Society which would give concrete form and shape to the missioning experience. In meeting the needs of those

seeking freedom and a more mature Christian life, in learning through his successes and failures in directing people, in relating to interior affective experiences and dreams similar to Peter's, in experiences which broke through his own prejudices and assumptions, Ignatius gradually came to know God's will for his life in a concrete way.

Perhaps these reflections on conversion can highlight aspects of the recent Congregations which might be lost or overlooked and provide a basis for further contemplation and development. The renewed stress on affective conversion as the source of mission continues the dynamic element of Ignatius' conversion and the foundation of the Society. First, we share with all Christians the mission of bringing "all men and women the Good News of their salvation and that 'they may have life and have it to the full.'"⁶⁶ Within this horizon of mission toward life, there is the further specification that such life comes through conversion.

As apostles we are bearers of the Christian message. And at the heart of the Christian message is God revealing Himself in Christ as the Father of us all whom through the Spirit He calls to conversion. In its integrity, then, conversion means accepting that we are at one and the same time children of the Father and brothers and sisters of each other. There is no genuine conversion to the love of God without conversion to the love of neighbor and, therefore, to the demands of justice.⁶⁷

The center of the Christian message is this affective conversion in which we realize our communion with all people in receiving the Spirit of Jesus in this deep experience of mercy and forgiveness. This kind of acceptance of others as brothers and sisters, this kind of conversion to the love of neighbor, is not something we can achieve on our own. It is not a matter of sincere choice or resolution; it is primarily discovered in the affective conversion reflected on in this issue of *Studies*. In this experience we find solidarity with our neighbors and an acceptance rising within us which we must affirm. It is not an acceptance that we can achieve merely by sincerely trying. It is an acceptance rising from solidarity with all men and women in the depths of temptation and suffering where compassion is the source of acceptance and mission.

The relationship of this kind of conversion to our mission today and to justice is very clear in the documents of the Congregation. Perhaps such a conversion can open up and provide a further context for the meaning of

the decree "On Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice":

The mission of the Society today is the priestly service of the faith. . . . The Gospel demands a life freed from egoism and self-seeking, from all attempts to seek one's own advantage and from every form of exploitation of one's neighbor. . . . It demands an openness and generosity to anyone in need, even a stranger or an enemy. . . . We do not acquire this attitude of mind by our own efforts alone. It is the fruit of the Spirit who transforms our hearts and fills them with the power of God's mercy, that mercy whereby he most fully shows forth His justice by drawing us, unjust though we are, to His friendship. It is by this that we know that the promotion of justice is an integral part of the priestly service of faith.⁶⁸

In this paper I have tried to enter into the experiences encountered when the Spirit transforms hearts. The process of conversion allows the Spirit to lead us into the desert of temptation to expose our injustice so that deep within our hearts we may experience the forgiveness promised in Jeremiah. This kind of conversion frees individuals "from egoism and self-seeking"⁶⁹ which are present within us no matter how much prayer, loyalty, and asceticism we may have practiced. Just as the apostles found freedom by undergoing their own deaths at the time of the passion and death of Jesus, so we too may find freedom, which is promised to us and can be a reality. Freedom from selfishness and transformation of heart are not choices we make. They are found in the faith and courage to endure the temptations that strike at the core of our being. Only here can true freedom be found. Only here can solidarity with and compassion for our true brothers and sisters be discovered. When we can befriend the brothers and sisters within ourselves, then we can befriend others as we meet them in mission. If the recognition of and efforts for others' rights are to spring from true Christian mission, they must have their source in the experience of conversion, of temptation, darkness, mercy, and new life. If work for justice does not spring from experience of this kind, it will soon become hollow and set the stage for new forms of injustice.

The mission of the Jesuit today "demands an openness and generosity to anyone in need, even a stranger or an enemy."⁷⁰ This demand cannot be only a resolution; it must insert us personally into the long history of God's faithfulness and love according to his reminder to reflect on his mystery.

In Deuteronomy we find the demand to "circumcise your heart then and be obstinate no longer; for Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of Lords. . . . It is he who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing. Love the stranger then, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:16-18). In the long memory that we have been strangers lost in the slavery and unfreedom of Egypt, we are in touch with the history of the call to deeper conversion found in the prophets and in Jesus. This theme becomes enfleshed again in the story of the Good Samaritan. Until we can find reconciliation with the strangers in ourselves who arise with unknown names on our inner journey of conversion, our preaching of reconciliation and justice will sound empty and abstract.

Again, if we would "hear anew the call of Christ dying and rising in the anguish and aspirations of men and women,"⁷¹ we must be able to listen to, to hear, to have a heart for the call of the interior Christ, my "word," dying and rising in our own anguish and aspirations. Only in this way will we have the "circumcised heart" with which to hear and understand the cries of others for healing and salvation and life.

D. Some Implications for Mission and Missioning Today

In the light of these reflections on affective conversion and its relationship to mission, it is helpful to reflect on some of the assumptions which Jesuits may have in speaking about mission and decision making, finding God's will.

Perhaps these reflections provide a new horizon against which to understand some of the decrees of the Congregation. One of these is:

A Jesuit, therefore, is essentially a man on a mission: a mission which he receives immediately from the Holy Father and from his own religious superiors, but ultimately from Christ himself, the one sent by the Father. It is by being sent that the Jesuit becomes a companion of Jesus.⁷²

It would seem that immediate sources of mission are often considered and focused on without sufficient reflection given to the ultimate source of mission in Jesus of Nazareth. Immediate missioning exists as a confirmation and witness to a deeper experience of mission found in conversion. This kind of mission, personally discovered in affective conversion experiences and temptation, makes it important to consider the missioning experiences of many

Jesuits and others. The Jesuit, like every Christian, becomes a companion of Jesus in the personal and affective passion, death, and resurrection experience of conversion.

That the Jesuit becomes a companion of Jesus in being sent can, if taken out of context, put too much emphasis on the questionable efficacy of the external act of sending. Sending in itself does not seem to make one a companion of Jesus. It does not sufficiently consider the interior experiences by which individuals experience such companionship with Jesus and the call of mission. In the same context, apostolic availability sometimes sounds as if Jesuits should have an inordinate detachment from who they are or what they are doing in order to be able to be sent. Apostolic availability occurs when individuals, through these conversion experiences, are more free and open to hear the needs and spirit that give rise to the cries of the poor, the ignorant, the suffering--of those who desire freedom and justice. This availability, related to conversion, allows individuals to discover new ways and means of preaching the Good News in the context of each one's apostolate, but it also allows for new directions and new dimensions in new apostolates where we discover the stranger who is our brother. Thus, both those sending and those being sent need to share the light and understanding that arise from the discernment of different spirits. They need to know the place in which the individual finds missioning, namely in the experience of companionship with Jesus of Nazareth.

In order that such an understanding of missioning can occur, it is important to place it within the context of discernment and discovering God's will. The 31st General Congregation determined that our training in spirituality "and that the very spiritual heritage of our Institute . . . is to be purified and enriched anew."⁷³ This was a call to conversion in our understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which hold such primacy in the Society. Soon the individually directed retreat began to prosper and to change our understanding of the *Exercises*, putting greater emphasis on individual affective experience and direct contemplation of the Scriptures. Growing from this was a renewal of spiritual direction and the understanding of spiritual development. In the light of these experiences, discernment and decision making, that is, finding God's will, became popular. Many methods and models for prayerfully discerning the pros and cons of issues

and choices arose, and some of these were packaged for distribution to other communities in discernment workshops. The emphasis in these was almost exclusively on the third time for making an election.

The dynamic of affective conversion experiences discussed in this present issue of *Studies* points, however, to the importance and validity of the second time for making an election. This is a time "when much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits."⁷⁴ The affective turmoil and purification of this kind of conversion can bring much light and understanding to the individual in the experience which leads to companionship with Jesus of Nazareth and to mission. In such experiences, discernment has its true place and meaning since it applies to distinguishing different affective movements. It would seem to be something of a distortion to apply discernment to occasions where there are no movements. Also, primary questions for such discernment and light in the second time would not be only whether one has prayed much, but whether one has suffered much, has experienced the confusion and pain of conflicting and opposing movements. Discernment and discovering God's will in decision takes on a radically different meaning in this second time than it has in the third time.

Correlatively, I suggest that the third time of election is often open to much misunderstanding. This situation is in a time of tranquillity, "that is, a time when the soul is not agitated by different spirits, and has free and peaceful use of its natural powers."⁷⁵ When individuals live mostly on a rational level unaware of or cut off from their deeper affections and movements, there can seem to be a tranquillity but it is the tranquillity of unawareness and not that described by Ignatius. This was the point of Pierre Favre's letter to Ignatius quoted earlier in this paper. Again, there is another kind of false tranquillity which we can all fall into when different parts of us shut down and are detached from our actual living experience. For some there can be the tranquillity of being becalmed, like a boat without motor or sail on a dead sea, slipping into forgetfulness of self. For others there can be a false tranquillity of quietism, a moving into a secret place to perform private rituals, chants, and laments with an air of resigned depression. For still others there is the false tranquillity of withdrawing into a dream world of ideal situations and future possibilities without much

relationship to the real world, the tranquillity of nursing within themselves the wounds of a hurt child. These are false tranquillities, but ones each of us must discover. In these instances individuals are not free, nor do they have the peaceful use of their natural powers. Prayer at such times is very detached though perhaps sincere and intent. True tranquillity appears when all one's emotions and feelings are alive and rooted in the center of one's being. This rootedness and centeredness of emotion and feeling is different from emotions and feelings which are unknown or cut off and restricted. This is a tranquillity when the emotions and feelings are in harmony but do not incline or move us as they do during the upheaval of affective conversion. Such authentic tranquillity is discovered in and known through turmoil of spirit. It is difficult to know the meaning of tranquillity of spirit unless one has deeply experienced its opposite in the movements of different spirits within.

Perhaps these reflections on conversion in its richness and mystery can provide a context for approaching the mission of individual Jesuits and of the Society today. Certain aspects of the documents of the General Congregation appear in new light; the individual experiences of many Jesuits and communities may find articulation, meaning, and challenge. The Jesuit who is authentically inspired by Ignatius would seem to be one who shares at some time in his life this kind of purification and conversion experience. In this he discovers his companionship with Jesus and mission. Undoubtedly he will find it congruent with the renewed self-understanding of mission in the Society today: the service of faith and the promotion of justice. Faith and justice, deeply rooted in the Gospels, are discovered personally in this affective conversion.

These considerations can allow the conversion experiences which are part of life to go on unimpeded. This is not a blueprint for change nor necessarily a call to direct action in social justice. It is a call to promote true justice for every person which arises out of the experience of justification in this conversion. This experience urges us to strive for and promote justice wherever there is any injustice. From such conversion will flow all kinds of changes such as occurred in the apostles, the Fathers, Ignatius, and many others who have lived life at these deeper levels.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This paper attempts to focus on the renewed understanding and the enrichment of our spiritual heritage encouraged by the 31st General Congregation and the growing awareness in the 32nd of the centrality of conversion both in the lives of individual Jesuits and as a source of mission in faith and justice. These experiences and this awareness have continued to grow and deepen since 1975 as Jesuits have sought to understand and implement the challenges of these Congregations and to meet the needs of people today. As we prepare for the 33rd General Congregation, perhaps there will be greater experience and awareness of affective conversion. Present events, giving rise to conflicting spirits, emotions, and feelings, may be part of this transformation for individual Jesuits and the Society as a whole. Such experiences call us within, call us to explore our inner world to find companionship with Jesus of Nazareth and the source of our mission today in faith and justice. They call us forward to something new that is occurring in the world and Church, just as every covenant experience found new and deeper life. "Yahweh is creating something new on the earth" (Jer. 31:21). Such experiences do not call us back in fear to something old that has already passed away. They call us to live as incarnately as Jesus--in our humanity and vulnerability. They call us to perceive with a heart of flesh the spirit crying out in the poor for faith and justice and to join with Jesus in proclaiming fullness of life, fighting against anything that would diminish others and ourselves, and searching for faith and justice.

The purpose of this exposition and discussion of conversion related to passion and death and issuing in Christian mission is not to glorify darkness, misery, sin, and struggle. No one should choose darkness as a spiritual "agenda"; that would be a distorted form of asceticism. If we choose life, living in abundance and love, we will soon discover the darknesses involved. If we choose to know Jesus of Nazareth intimately, we will experience temptation in trying to live as incarnately as he did.

We should not choose darkness, but we should not avoid the darknesses which are so much a part of the rhythm and fabric of life. Also, we must fight against the illusion that the way of darkness and suffering is not part of today's spirituality. My hope is that individuals may recognize moments of conversion in their ordinary experience where they may not at

first have realized the dynamics of this process. Perhaps this understanding will allow them to be unafraid of their experiences no matter how disturbing and confusing they may be or how unholy they may seem. If we can be rid of the fear of our fear, we may be led to the reverential and awesome fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. We may enter the process of purification and healing necessary to experience and to know that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is knowing that is beyond belief.

On the way, individuals may find in themselves the religious mind-set of the apostles, steeped in the tradition of their Jewish heritage as found in Exodus where God is a jealous God who punishes the faults of the fathers in their sons (Ex. 20:5). When they saw the man born blind they asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" (John 9:2). As individuals experience the pain of their own blindness and unfreedom in the limit experience of conversion, perhaps they will have an exaggerated sense of guilt about having displeased a jealous God. It is important to remember Jesus' response: "Neither he nor his parents sinned. . . . He was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). In these words Jesus overturned a belief derived from the best tradition of Moses; he changed and enriched that spiritual heritage, and indicated that healing and forgiveness are not just related to personal guilt. Rather, they are ways whereby the individual may come to newer and fuller life and love. Often these conversion experiences can overturn beliefs and lead to a fuller life manifesting the surprising ways in which God communicates himself to men and women. Thus, the experiences which may lead us from blindness to seeing, from darkness to light, are not punishment. They are liberation and the manifestation of the glory of God in a person fully alive. This is the man or woman of mission!

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), p. 74, marginal number # 21. Hereafter abbreviated as *DocsGC31&32*, p. 74, # 21.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 191.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 98-100, ## 82, 83, 90.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 397, # 9.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 421, # 77.
- 6 Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *The Second Journey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). In this book O'Collins describes the phenomena of this second conversion in terms of spiritual awakening; there are similarities to recent books about mid-life crisis.
- 7 Bernard Lonergan, S.J., "Theology in Its New Context," in L. K. Shook (ed.), *Theology of Renewal*, Vol. 1 (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1968), pp. 44-45.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 9 Thomas Merton, blurb for the jacket of *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McConnell (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962). These remarks were written specifically for the book cover and appear nowhere else.
- 10 Lonergan, op. cit., p. 36.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 12 T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945), p. 69.
- 13 William Johnston, S.J., *The Mirror Mind* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 113.
- 14 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1972), p. 37.
- 15 Pierre Favre, "Epistola Patribus Ignatio de Loyola et Petro Codacio, Spira, 25 Januarii, 1541," in *Fabri Monumenta* (Madrid: Typis Gabrielis Lopez del Horno, 1914), p. 638.
- 16 Johnston, op. cit., p. 115.
- 17 *Spiritual Exercises*, Louis Puhl, S.J., trans. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), [6].
- 18 Favre, op. cit., pp. 638-639.
- 19 Nouwen, op. cit., pp. 37-38.
- 20 In his work on suffering, Louis Evely writes: "Suffering chosen as a testimony of love (instead of a love faithful even unto suffering) seems to be an invention of ascetics. Having fled from the world, from its temptations and its worries for a solitude or a 'cloistered paradise,' uneasy over the facility of their life, they have racked their brains for these gratuitous mortifications which were a very poor replacement for those which their contemporaries would have generously provided them with, with the twofold advantage that they would not have chosen them, and they would have been useful to the others" (Louis Evely, *Suffering* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1967], p. 31).

- 21 O'Collins, op. cit., pp. 38-40.
- 22 Joseph de Guibert, S.J., *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), p. 28.
- 23 Johnston, op. cit., p. 117.
- 24 Theresa of Avila, "The Interior Castle", in *The Collected Works of St. Theresa of Avila*, vol. II, Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh, trans., Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1980, p. 336.
- 25 Jean Daniélou, S.J., *God and the Ways of Knowing* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 216.
- 26 M. Esther Harding, *The Value and Meaning of Depression*, A Paper read before the Analytical Psychology Club of New York, 1960.
- 27 *Spiritual Exercises*, [327].
- 28 John S. Maddux, "When you Pray," *The Way*, XVII, 3 (July, 1977), p. 236.
- 29 James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 17.
- 30 Ibid., p. 20.
- 31 Maddux, op. cit., pp. 230-231.
- 32 Ibid., p. 230.
- 33 Ibid., p. 231.
- 34 Ibid., p. 231.
- 35 Ibid., p. 231.
- 36 Ibid., p. 233.
- 37 *Autograph Directories of Ignatius Loyola* (Program to Adapt the Spiritual Exercises: Jersey City), p. 27.
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- 40 George Maloney, S.J., "Tears and Enlightenment," *Review for Religious*, XXXIII (1974), 6., p. 1397.
- 41 These conclusions were summarized at the Loyola Conference on the Spiritual Exercises and published in the BAC series.
- 42 Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), pp. 76-78 passim.
- 43 Evelyn Waugh, *Monsignor Ronald Knox* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1959), pp. 207-208.
- 44 Margery Kempe et al., *The Cell of Self-Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1981). This quotation was taken from the New Crossroads Review.
- 45 St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodrigues, trans., (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1973), p. 321.

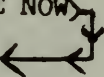
- 46 Ibid., p. 323.
- 47 St. Theresa of Avila, op. cit., p. 284.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 291-292.
- 49 Ibid., p. 416.
- 50 Karl Rahner, "Virtue of Penance," in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 4 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 385.
- 51 Louis Evelyn, op. cit., p. 31.
- 52 Pierre Favre, op. cit., pp. 221-222. Italics supplied.
- 53 Harvey D. Egan, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976), pp. 66-67.
- 54 *Spiritual Exercises*, [322].
- 55 William J. Connolly, S.J., "Experiences of Darkness in Directed Retreats," *Review for Religious*, XXXIII (1974), 3, p. 611.
- 56 St. Theresa of Avila, op. cit., p. 293.
- 57 Ibid., p. 388.
- 58 Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961), p. 4-5.
- 59 Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality* (New York: Image Books, 1980), pp. 290 ff.
- 60 *DocsGC31&32*, op. cit., # 62, p. 414.
- 61 William Johnston, op. cit., p. 168.
- 62 Ibid., p. 169.
- 63 John Maddux, op. cit., pp. 230-231.
- 64 Sebastian Moore, O.S.B., *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger* (New York: Crossroad Books, 1977), pp. 85-89.
- 65 William J. Connolly, S.J., op. cit., p. 610.
- 66 *DocsGC31&32*, op. cit., p. 414, # 62.
- 67 Ibid., p. 421, # 77.
- 68 Ibid., p. 416, # 67.
- 69 Ibid., p. 416, # 67.
- 70 Ibid., p. 416, # 67.
- 71 Ibid., p. 417, # 68.
- 72 Ibid., p. 404, # 24.
- 73 Ibid., p. 74, # 21.
- 74 *Spiritual Exercises*, [176].
- 75 Ibid.

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